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THE EXPRESSIVE ROLE OF RHYTHM AND METER IN SCHUMANN'S LATE LIEDER

HARALD KREBS

It has long been recognized that Robert Schumann was, along with Beethoven and Brahms, one of the great pioneers of rhythm and meter in the nineteenth century. From his writings, it is evident that he was interested in these aspects of music from a theoretical standpoint; his frequent comments on rhythm and meter, in his reviews of other composers' works, show how attentive he was to these aspects.¹ But his interest went beyond the theoretical: as his music makes clear, he regarded rhythm and meter as significant expressive elements. Nowhere is his awareness of their expressive power more evident than in his *Lieder*, where the presence of a text makes it possible to determine precisely what Schumann was trying to convey. In this article, I draw attention to three kinds of rhythmic and metric practices that have expressive functions in Schumann's songs. I focus on his late songs because two of the procedures I discuss are particularly prominent in his late music, and also because the late songs are (undeservedly) not as familiar as those from the *Liederjahr*.

¹ In his review of Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, for instance, Schumann praised the flexible association of even- and odd-numbered proportions of measures (i.e., juxtaposition of hypermeasures of four bars and of odd numbers of bars). See Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker von Robert Schumann*, 5th edn., ed. Martin Kreisig (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1914), vol. 1, 74. For additional examples of Schumann's comments on rhythm and meter, see Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Chapter 1.

I begin with a procedure that occurs close to the musical surface of Schumann's *Lieder*, namely *the distortion of poetic rhythm*. Poetic rhythm is a complex matter, and the relation between musical (specifically vocal) rhythm and poetic rhythm is even more complex. Whereas it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss these issues in detail,² some explanation of what I mean by poetic rhythm is necessary. I define poetic rhythm as the regular rhythm that underlies the recitation of a poem. This rhythm has an accentual and a durational component. The accentual component is constrained by the correct pronunciation of the words in the given language (to which poets usually adhere), and by the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables (the so-called poetic meter) that the poet has selected. The durational aspect of poetic rhythm is determined to some extent by the regularities inherent in the given language. German is a "stress-timed language"; the rhythmic units are feet, which last approximately the same length of time. The durational equivalence of feet is approximate, especially in the oral recitation of poetry. As Susan Youens has pointed out, only certain genres of poetry, primarily the lighter and more comical ones, would be read in a strictly regular rhythm.³ Expressive readings of serious poetry always involve some fluctuation in the duration of the feet. Poetic rhythm, then, is subject to a certain amount of distortion even outside of a musical setting. In spite of the undeniable fluctuations during any given recitation, it is possible to posit, at least for the poetry with which we are concerned here (i.e., nineteenth-century German lyric poetry), a regular "basic poetic rhythm," which would be the foundation for any recitation.

² For a discussion of some of the complexities involved in the interaction of vocal and poetic rhythm, see Martin Boykan, "Reflections on Words and Music," *Musical Quarterly* 84/1 (2000): 123–36.

³ Susan Youens, "Poetic Rhythm and Musical Metre in Schubert's *Winterreise*," *Music and Letters* 67/3 (1986), 29.

When poetry is set to music, this basic rhythm may be subjected to much more drastic distortions than it would be in a non-musical recitation. Lawrence Kramer has written, “No matter how muted or naturalized it may become, the primary fact about song is what might be called a topological distortion of utterance under the rhythmic and harmonic stress of music: a pulling, stretching, and twisting that deforms the current of speech without negating its basic linguistic shape.”⁴ In an article on Copland’s setting of one of Emily Dickinson’s poems, Michael Cherlin similarly remarks, “To set is to upset, offset, inset, and, shifting the syllabic emphasis, to beset. Assailed at all sides, the poem is placed at the mercy of the composer’s whims.”⁵ Cherlin here alludes to the specific type of deformation with which I am concerned: the pulling, stretching, and twisting to which poetic rhythm is subjected in musical settings. Of course, such distortion is not actually a matter of the composer’s whims (as Cherlin makes clear at the end of his article); the composer usually has expressive reasons for indulging in this practice—and Schumann is no exception.

Distortion of poetic rhythm is common in Schumann’s late songs; indeed this is one way in which his early and late songs can be distinguished. Figure 1 shows the vocal line of a number of songs from the *Liederjahr* (1840), and one from just before the inception of what is usually considered Schumann’s “late period” (1849–56). The asterisks in this and subsequent examples show the locations of poetic stresses.⁶ The fact that the asterisks are approximately equidistant

⁴ Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 130.

⁵ Michael Cherlin, “Thoughts on Poetry and Music, on Rhythms in Emily Dickinson, ‘The World Feels Dusty’ and Aaron Copland’s Setting of It,” *Intégral* 5 (1991), 75.

⁶ The asterisk notation comes from the work of Morris Halle, a linguist who has written a great deal on stress in poetry. See, for example, Halle and Jean-Roger Vergnaud, *An Essay on Stress* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990). The numbers above the staves of Figure 1, showing hyperbeats, will be discussed in a later section. It was not possible to include full scores of the song examples; readers are encouraged to consult a score.

FIGURE 1. Vocal lines from selected early songs by Robert Schumann, showing compliance with the poetic rhythm

(a) “Die Rose, die Lilie,” op. 48/3 (1840)

(Translation: “The rose, the lily, the dove, the sun, I once loved all of them with joyous love.”)

* 1 * 2 * 3 * 4 *

Die Ro-se, die Li-lie, die Tau-be, die Son-ne, die liebt' ich einst al-le in Lie-bes-won-ne,

(b) “In der Fremde,” op. 39/1 (1840)

(Translation: “From my homeland, behind the red bolts of lightning, come the clouds.”)

* 1 * 2 * 3 * 4 *

Aus der Hei-mat hin-ter den Blit-zen rot da kom-men die Wol-ken her.

(c) “An meinem Herzen,” op. 42/7 (1840)

(Translation: “[Lying] on my heart, on my breast, you my delight, you my joy!”)

* 1 * 2 * 3 * 4 *

An mei-nem Her-zen, an mei-ner Brust, du mei-ne Won-ne, du mei-ne Lust!

(d) “Auf dem Rhein,” op. 51/4 (1846)

(Translation: “On your [the Rhine’s] bottom, they have, in a secret place, buried the golden treasure, the hoard of the Nibelungs.”)

* 1 * 2 * 3 * 4 *

Auf dei-nem Grun-de ha-ben sie an ver-borg'-nem Ort den
gold'-nen Schatz be-gra-ben, der Ni-be-lun-gen Hort.

suggests the regularity of the rhythm of the poem and, moreover, demonstrates that in these early songs, Schumann's vocal rhythms adhere very closely to the durational aspect of the poetic rhythm. The consistent association in the excerpts in Figure 1 of poetic stresses with metrical beats reveals that Schumann is no less concerned with matching the accentual component of poetic rhythm in his musical setting. In Figure 1a, for instance, he associates all poetic stresses with the quarter-note beats of the $\frac{2}{4}$ meter.

The vocal rhythm of Schumann's later songs is generally much less compliant with the basic poetic rhythm; instances of distortion abound.⁷ Figure 2a shows a portion of the text (by Elisabeth Kulmann) of Schumann's "Die Schwalben," op. 104/2, with asterisks to show stresses. I have shown two layers of stresses; the lower layer shows all stressed syllables, the upper layer those syllables that are most heavily stressed.⁸ The lower-level stresses are perfectly regular throughout the poem (which is written in strict iambic trimeter). The higher-level stresses, too, are quite regular; in all lines except the first and the penultimate lines ("und reich an WUN-dern wäre"), the second and fourth stresses are stronger than the third.

Figure 2b is my revision of the corresponding portion of Schumann's vocal line, in which I have cloaked the basic poetic rhythm (as shown by the asterisks) in Schumann's melodic garb. This hypothetical setting shows how Schumann's vocal rhythm would have turned out if he had

⁷ There are occasional instances of expressive poetic distortion even in Schumann's *Liederjahr* songs. See, for example, the third strophe of the Robert Burns setting, "Wie kann ich froh und munter sein?", op. 25/20. The first two strophes adhere strictly to the poetic rhythm, but in the third strophe, at the words "Handschuh mir" ([He gave the] gloves to me), Schumann modifies the rhythm of the vocal line, moving the stressed syllables "Hand-" and "mir" from their expected position on strong beats of the $\frac{3}{8}$ measures onto weak eighth-note pulses, the strong beats being occupied by rests. This distortion is highly expressive; it suggests the woman's loss of control as she contemplates the gifts that her absent lover gave her—perhaps even her sobs.

⁸ The idea of two layers of stresses again comes from Morris Halle's method of analyzing verse. The higher-level asterisks in this and subsequent examples correspond to the way I read the given excerpts; other readers might read them slightly differently.

FIGURE 2. Schumann, “Die Schwalben,” op. 104/2 (1851)

(a) Text excerpt

(Translation: “Best of luck for your journey, swallows! You hurry, a long train,
toward the beautiful, warm south in merry, brave flight.”)

* * *

* * *

Viel Glück zur Reise, Schwalben!

* * *

* * *

Ihr eilt, ein langer Zug,

* * *

* * *

zum schönen, warmen Süden

* * *

* * *

in frohem, kühnem Flug.

(b) Hypothetical vocal setting of the excerpt

Viel Glück zur Rei - se, Schwal - ben! Ihr eilt, ein lan - ger Zug, zum
schö - nen war - men Sü - den in fro - hem, küh - nem Flug.

(c) Actual vocal line, mm. 4–10

Viel Glück zur Rei - se, Schwal - ben! Ihr eilt, ein lan - ger
Zug, zum schö - nen war - men Sü - den in fro - hem, küh - nem Flug.

(d) Vocal line, mm. 11–14

(Translation: “Gladly would I someday make the journey with you.”)

Gern möch - te wohl die Rei - se ich ein - mal tun mit euch,

been concerned with strict adherence to the poetic rhythm. Comparison of such “resettings” with Schumann’s actual vocal rhythm highlights how he has “upset, offset, inset, and beset” the poems. Figure 2c shows Schumann’s actual vocal line; italicized text draws attention to passages where the poetic rhythm is distorted, i.e., where the vocal rhythm deviates from the basic poetic rhythm as shown in Figure 2b. One would, for instance, expect a pause after the word “Zug”; Schumann, however, creates an enjambment that is not present in the poem, and continues without a break to the next line, “zum schönen warmen Süden.” The latter line “should” be associated with the same vocal rhythm as the first line (“Viel Glück zur Reise, Schwalben”), which is identical in terms of poetic rhythm. Instead Schumann rushes “zum schönen warmen Süden,” and even disrupts the expected accentuation by placing the heavily stressed syllables “schö-” and “Sü-” on weak beats, and the relatively weak first syllable of the word “warmen” on a downbeat. After the hastening at “zum schönen warmen Süden,” he elongates the words “frohem, kühnem” so that each of them occupies an entire bar. Note that in my revision (Figure 2b), these words were both contained in one bar; the shorter duration of these words would be much closer to the poetic rhythm than the elongated one in Schumann’s setting.

Schumann irregularizes the rhythm of the following lines as well (Figure 2d). The poetic rhythm of the lines “Gern möchte wohl die Reise / ich einmal tun mit euch” is identical to that of the first two lines of the poem, and could therefore have been set to the same vocal rhythm. Instead, after an unexpected syncopated elongation at the word “wohl,” Schumann hastens the syllables “Reise ich einmal” so that they become almost unpronounceable. A poem that is perfectly regular and predictable in rhythm is, in Schumann’s setting, rendered erratic and unpredictable.⁹

⁹ Ulrich Mahlert makes similar observations about—and presents similar recompositions of—other songs from op. 104 in “‘. . . die Spuren einer himmlischen Erscheinung zurücklassend’: Zu Schumanns Liedern nach Gedichten

Schumann clearly has text-expressive reasons for his distortions. The premature entry and hasty rhythm of the third line (“zum schönen warmen Süden”) is surely motivated by the reference to “hurrying” just before (the word “eilt” in the second line means “hurry”). Moreover, Schumann’s alternation between hasty and stretched vocal rhythms deliciously evokes the unpredictable darting and soaring of the swallows—an effect that a setting based more strictly on the poetic rhythm could not have achieved.

Another late Schumann song that illustrates an expressive distortion of poetic rhythm is the beautiful Platen setting “Ihre Stimme,” op. 96/3 (Figure 3). In the poem, the lyric “I” describes the miraculous effect of the beloved’s voice, which, even if heard only from afar, causes him to tremble and to ignite with passion. In Figure 3a, my analysis of the poetic rhythm of the opening is allied with a revision of the opening vocal line that complies with that rhythm. Compare Schumann’s actual vocal line, shown in Figure 3b; distorted portions are again highlighted by text in italics. This opening is far removed from the implications of the poetic rhythm; both the metrical and durational accentuation of the first syllable (“Lass”) and the rushing of the words “tief in dir” are unexpected. The vocal rhythm moves into alignment with the poetic rhythm at the end of the first line (at “lesen”), and the second line (“verhehl auch dies mir nicht”) remains in accord with the poetic rhythm. The third line (“Was für ein Zauberwesen”) again begins with distortion, namely with the early entry and elongation of the word “was.” Since the first syllable of “Zauberwesen” (magical being) is strongly stressed in the poem,¹⁰ Schumann’s emphasis on it is not outlandish; nevertheless, he stretches this syllable beyond what would be

von Elisabeth Kulmann op. 104,” *Schumann Forschungen* 3 (“Schumann in Düsseldorf”), ed. Bernhard Appel (Mainz: Schott, 1993): 119–40.

¹⁰ The rhythm of Platen’s poem is irregular at the beginning of the third line; a trochee, “Was für,” appears in the midst of the otherwise regular iambic trimeter. The light syllables “für ein” function as an anacrusis to the strongly stressed word “Zauberwesen.”

FIGURE 3. Schumann, “Ihre Stimme,” op. 96/3 (1850)

(a) Hypothetical vocal setting of beginning of text
 (Translation: “Let me read what is deep within you; do not conceal this from me:
 what kind of a magical spirit speaks through your voice!”)

Lass tief in dir mich le - sen, ver - hehl auch dies mir nicht,
 was für ein Zau - ber - we - sen aus dei - ner Stim - me spricht!

(b) Actual vocal line, mm. 1–8

Lass tief in dir mich le - sen, ver - hehl auch dies mir nicht, was für ein
 Zau - ber - we - sen aus dei - ner Stim - me spricht!

acceptable even in an expressive recitation, thereby creating an effect of distortion. Again, Schumann’s vocal rhythm is perfectly appropriate with respect to the expression of the meaning of the poem: his flexible, indeed distortive rhythm creates a sensation of nervousness, of passionate agitation that beautifully reflects the emotions of the lyric “I,” who is so deeply stirred by the beloved’s voice.

I provide one more example of expressive distortion of poetic rhythm in a late Schumann song, namely “Der schwere Abend,” op. 90/6 (Figure 4).¹¹ This is the bleakest of the six poems by Lenau that Schumann selected for this opus. The lyric “I” describes a silent, sultry, starless

¹¹ Yonatan Malin draws attention to similar irregularities in Schumann’s deployment of the poetic rhythm in op. 90/5 in his *Songs in Motion: Rhythm and Meter in the German Lied* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

FIGURE 4. Schumann, “Der schwere Abend,” op. 90/6 (1850)

(a) Hypothetical vocal setting of beginning of text
(Translation: “The dark clouds hung downward so fearfully and heavily.”)

Die dunk-len Wol-ken hin-gen her-ab so bang und schwer,

(b) Actual vocal line, mm. 1–6

Die dunk-len Wol-ken hin-gen her-ab sobang und schwer,

(c) Hypothetical vocal setting of ending of text
(Translation: “In my heart I sadly uttered the wish that both of us were dead.”)

wünscht ich be-küm-mert bei-den im Her-zen uns den Tod.

(d) Actual vocal ending

wünscht ich be-küm-mert bei-den im Her-zen uns den Tod.

night, with dark clouds hanging down, in which he walked in the garden with his beloved. He compares this night to their love: both are made only for tears. He takes farewell from the beloved and, as he does so, wishes that both of them were dead.

Lenau’s poem is perfectly regular in rhythm; it strictly maintains iambic trimeter. Schumann’s vocal rhythm for the first line, shown in Figure 4b, is somewhat surprising (i.e., duplet quarter notes within $\frac{3}{4}$ time), but it fits the poetic rhythm like a glove. Since the second line duplicates the poetic rhythm of the first, one would expect it to maintain the same vocal rhythm (as shown in Figure 4a). Instead, Schumann uses surprisingly quick note values in his

setting of the second line, and thereby compresses it into one-half the duration of the first. This distortion has immense expressive impact: it beautifully conveys the meaning of the words “bang” (anxious or fearful) and “schwer” (heavy). The hasty, furtive eighth notes at “so bang und” create a sense of breathless anxiety that the more predictable vocal rhythm shown in Figure 4a would not have produced. Moreover, the quick anacrusis at “so bang und” results in the perfectly appropriate effect of a heavy landing on the word “schwer.”

Schumann uses the same distortion again in the equivalent second strophe (mm. 26–27) and at the very end of the vocal line (mm. 58–59). Compare Figure 4c, a revision of the ending of the vocal line that complies with the poetic rhythm, to Schumann’s actual vocal ending, Figure 4d. Again, Schumann’s hasty, distortive vocal rhythm at “Herzen uns den” contributes to the creation of an appropriate sense of agitation and anxiety, and the anacrusic effect of the quick notes results in a much heavier weighting of the crucial word “Tod” (death) than would the rhythm of the revision.



“Der schwere Abend” leads naturally into the second of the three devices that I wish to address, namely *metrical dissonance*. By metrical dissonance, I mean conflict against the primary meter, as represented by the barlines and the time signature. Such conflict takes two basic forms. *Grouping dissonance* results from the superposition, on the regular layers of pulses that delineate the primary meter, of one or more regular layers that are incongruent with them. *Displacement dissonance* arises through superposition on the metrical layers of congruent but displaced layers.¹²

¹² These types of metrical conflict are discussed and illustrated in detail in Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces*; see especially 31–39. The terms “grouping dissonance” and “displacement dissonance” originate with Peter Kaminsky; see his

Metrical dissonance is very common in Schumann's music before 1845, but declines in frequency in his later music. It does, however, appear in some of his later works, and "Der schwere Abend" is a striking example. In this song, Schumann uses both grouping and displacement dissonance to create a sense of tension and anxiety. The duplets in the vocal line at the opening and at corresponding locations form a grouping dissonance in conjunction with the piano's normal quarter notes. Weak-beat dynamic accents that punctuate the end of the first couplets of the first two stanzas (mm. 8 and 28) result in displacement dissonance. The dissonance created by the third-beat accents becomes very prominent in the postlude (Figure 5); the obvious staggering of the attacks of the two hands in mm. 59–60 creates non-aligned, three-quarter-note layers, and the antimetrical layer takes over entirely in mm. 61–66, where all attacks are displaced in relation to the bar lines. The frequent use of metrical dissonance in this song was surely inspired by the poetic theme of discord between erstwhile lovers.

FIGURE 5. Displacement dissonance in the postlude of "Der schwere Abend"

The musical score for the postlude of "Der schwere Abend" (measures 59-66) is shown. The vocal line (top staff) consists of eighth notes with triplet markings (3) above them. The piano accompaniment (bottom staff) features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and dynamic markings (p, f, pp). The piano part includes a series of chords and single notes, with some measures containing triplets. The overall texture is dense and dissonant, reflecting the metrical dissonance discussed in the text.

"Aspects of Harmony, Rhythm, and Form in Schumann's *Papillons*, *Carnaval*, and *Davidsbündlertänze*" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1989), 27.

Two of the other songs within Schumann's op. 90 are even richer in expressive metrical dissonance.¹³ In the first song, "Lied eines Schmiedes," displacement dissonance prevails; the pianist's hands delineate consistently non-aligned half-note layers, separated by a quarter beat. Here, the combination of non-aligned half-note layers is *not* an expression of tension and conflict. As Jon Finson has pointed out, its function is merely onomatopoeic and ultimately humorous: it suggests either the sound of the blacksmith's hammer, or the sound of a horse's hooves.¹⁴

Just as the first song of op. 90 is dominated by displacement dissonance, the second song, "Meine Rose," is obsessed with grouping dissonance. In much of the song, the eighth-note pulse is simultaneously grouped into threes and into twos, so that the notated $\frac{6}{8}$ meter is consistently assailed by an unnotated $\frac{3}{4}$ meter. The pervasive metrical dissonance of this song has a text-expressive motivation as well. In the first strophe, the lyric "I" describes how a rose, faded by the hot sun, can be revived with water. In the second strophe, the lyric "I" expresses the wish that he could pour out his soul to the suffering beloved, and that this outpouring could cause the same joyful resurrection as the watering of the rose. There is no indication that the lyric "I" actually *does* pour out his soul, let alone that the beloved reawakens to joyful ardor. Schumann's unremitting use of grouping dissonance suggests that he interpreted the poem as implying a continuing, unresolved tension between the two individuals who are mentioned in the poem.

¹³ The metrical dissonances in op. 90/1 and 2 are discussed in greater detail in Krebs, "Meter and Expression in Robert Schumann's Op. 90," a paper delivered at McGill University in September 2006, at the conference "'New Paths': Robert Schumann, 1848–1856." The paper will appear in the collection *Rethinking Schumann*, ed. Roe-Min Kok and Laura Tunbridge (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁴ Jon Finson proposed these interpretations in "Schumann's 'Dresden Style': The *Sechs Gedichte*, op. 90, and the Analysis of His Late Songs," a paper delivered at the University of Manchester in July 2006, during the Late Schumann Study Day sponsored by Society for Music Analysis.

Whereas such extensive and overt metrical dissonance is quite rare in Schumann's late songs, some of them exhibit a more subtle kind of metrical conflict that is related to the rhythmic procedure discussed earlier—the distortion of poetic rhythm. As I mentioned, prosodists, including Morris Halle, have recognized that there can exist deeper-level stresses in lyric poetry; in a given line, there may be one or even two especially strong stresses. When deeper-level poetic stresses are approximately equally spaced, they have implications for the meter of musical settings; just as they organize surface-level poetic stresses into larger groups, these deeper-level stresses imply a deeper-level organization of the surface-level musical rhythm. A composer may comply with or counteract those implications—and Schumann, for text-expressive reasons, often chooses the latter path.

The text of Schumann's "Warnung," op. 119/2 (Figure 6), suggests duple or quadruple meter, as a reading with stresses on the capitalized syllables will make clear (these are the deep-level stresses, as I interpret them): "Es GEHT der Tag zur NEIGE/ der LICHT und FREIheit bot; / o SCHWEIge, Vöglein, SCHWEI-ge, / du SINGST dich in den TOD." There is some ambiguity with respect to placement of the deeper-level stresses in the second line (should they be assigned to "Licht" or to "Frei-", or to both?). This ambiguity notwithstanding, the poetic rhythm suggests the metrical alignment shown in Figure 6a; in this hypothetical setting, all unambiguous deep-level stresses coincide with metrical downbeats.

Schumann, however, sets most of the poem in such a way that the complementary pair of stresses falls on downbeats (Figure 6b); the primary stresses of the poem are placed on third beats, and therefore act as an accentual layer displaced by two beats in relation to the metrical downbeats. Interestingly, Schumann does not displace the entire poem; for example, he associates the word "Tod" (as opposed to earlier deep-level stressed syllables) with a downbeat. In

FIGURE 6. Schumann, "Warnung," op. 119/2 (1851)

(a) Hypothetical vocal setting
(Translation: "The day, which offered light and liberty, wanes; oh be silent, little bird, be silent; you are singing yourself to death.")

Es geht der Tag zur Nei - ge, der Licht und Frei - heit bot, o
schwei - ge, Vög - lein schwei - ge, du singst dich in den Tod.

(b) Actual vocal line, showing subtle displacement dissonance

Es geht der Tag zur Nei - ge, der Licht und Frei - heit bot,
o schwei - ge, Vög - lein schwei - ge, du singst dich in den Tod.

order to match "death" with a downbeat, Schumann has to rush the preceding words, "du singst dich in den." A surface-level distortion enables a deep-level compliance with the poetic rhythm.

The subtle displacement that dominates "Warnung" is powerfully expressive; it contributes significantly to the sense of disquiet that is central to the poem. The alignment between poetic stress and metrical accentuation achieved by the hastening at "singst dich in den" is no less expressive; by setting these words as a quick anacrusis, Schumann increases the urgency of the warning (in comparison to the expected, more leisurely rhythm shown in Figure 6a). Also, the impact of the crucial word "Tod" is enhanced because it follows a rapid anacrustic figure (a situation similar to that at the end of "Der schwere Abend"). It is noteworthy that at the very end of the song (m. 27), Schumann sets the restatement of this line with precisely the rhythm that I

associated with it in my revision (Figure 6a). It is as if it is too late for urgent warnings: the singer's fate is sealed.

A very late song that is replete with a similar subtle displacement is “Nach der Geburt ihres Sohnes,” op. 135/2—a setting of a poem ascribed to Mary Stuart, translated by the German poet Gisbert, Freiherr von Vincke. The poetic rhythm implies the vocal rhythm and metric placement shown in Figure 7a. In sharp contradistinction to this hypothetical setting, Schumann's setting (Figure 7b) severely distorts the poetic rhythm on the surface level. Notice the irregularity of the vocal rhythm, which the poetic rhythm does not in the least imply; especially striking is the frequent hurrying of syllables (see mm. 4, 8, 10, and 11). Three elongations beyond what the poetic rhythm suggests (in mm. 6, 13, and 16–18) stand out all the more because of the numerous hasty passages.

Aside from this surface-level distortion, Schumann almost consistently counteracts the music-metrical implications of the poetic rhythm. The only instances of alignment of deep-level poetic stresses with metrical accents occur—surely not coincidentally—at the main cadences (mm. 5–6, 12–13, and 17; notice that the double asterisks fall on downbeats at these points). For the most part, however, Schumann places the strongest stresses on the third beats of bars rather than on the first; the result is a displacement of the poetic stresses by two quarter-note beats with respect to the main metrical accents in the music.

It is illuminating to compare Schumann's vocal rhythm to my revision (Figure 7a). The revision is chorale-like, expressive merely of devoutness and piety. The numerous surface-level distortions as well as the subtle displacement dissonance in Schumann's song do not entirely destroy the prayerful atmosphere, but they do inject a restlessness and agitation that are appropriate for this specific prayer—one by a doomed woman for her newborn son.

FIGURE 7. Schumann, "Nach der Geburt ihres Sohnes," op. 135/2 (1852)

(a) Hypothetical vocal setting

(Translation: "Lord Jesus Christ, whom they crowned with thorns, protect the birth of this newborn, and if it be your will, let his descendants rule long in this kingdom.

And everything that occurs in his name, let it be to your glory and honor, Amen.")

Herr Je - su Christ, den sie ge-krönt mit Dor-nen, be - schüt - ze die Ge - burt des hier ge - bor - nen, und sei's dein Will', lass sein Ge - schlecht zu - gleich lang herr - schen noch in die - sem Kö - nig - reich, — Und al - les, was ge - schieht in sei - nem Na - men, sei dir zu Ruhm und Preis und Eh - re, A - men.

(b) Actual vocal line

Herr Je - su Christ, den sie ge-krönt mit Dor-nen, be - schüt - ze die Ge - burt des hier Ge - bor - nen. Und sei's dein Will, lass sein Ge - schlecht zu - gleich lang herr - schen noch in die - sem Kö - nig - reich. Und al - les, was ge schieht in sei - nem Na - men, sei dir zu Ruhm und Preis und Eh - re, A - men.

A third durational element that Schumann employs for expressive purposes is *hyper-metric irregularity*. Numerous music theorists, including Edward Cone, Carl Schachter, Jonathan Kramer, and William Rothstein, have written about hypermeter—i.e., meter at a level higher than the bar.¹⁵ The theory of hypermeter is based on the observation that bars in tonal music are often organized into approximately equivalent higher-level groups, within which individual bars function in a manner analogous to beats within a single bar. To use the technical terminology coined by Cone and further developed by Schachter, Kramer, and Rothstein, the bars are *hyperbeats* within larger *hypermeasures*. The most common hypermetric grouping is that of four bars, which subdivides into two two-bar segments; the odd-numbered bars are accented, as are the first and third beats of a bar of quadruple meter.

Normal four-bar hypermeter is not expressive in itself; it is by deviating from normal hypermeter that expressive effects can be achieved. Schumann rarely indulged in such deviation before 1849; it was usually against the background of regular four-bar hypermeter that he deployed powerfully expressive elements such as the conflicts that I call metrical dissonances. Only in his late music did he begin to explore hypermetric irregularities, and to discover ways to use them in the service of expression.

The irregular hypermetric structure that is so common in Schumann's late songs quickly comes into focus when one compares them with the early songs. Figure 1 (referenced previously)

¹⁵ See Edward Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968); Carl Schachter, "Rhythm and Linear Analysis: Aspects of Meter," *Music Forum* 6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 1–60; Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988); and William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989). For a concise introduction to the theory of hypermeter, see Harald Krebs, "Hypermeter and Hypermetric Irregularity in the Songs of Josephine Lang," in *Engaging Music. Essays in Music Analysis*, ed. Deborah Stein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13–29.

shows some examples of Schumann's characteristic use of four-bar hypermeter in songs from his earlier period. Nineteenth-century German lyric poetry, with its regular line lengths, maps naturally onto hypermetric regularity in musical settings; and in his early songs, Schumann usually followed this implication of the poetry.

Not so in the late songs. The first vocal number from Schumann's *Spanische Liebeslieder*, op. 138, composed in 1849, provides a good example of his exploration of hypermetric irregularity. This song is unremarkable in terms of harmony and surface-level rhythm; it is the hypermeter that makes it interesting, and that contributes more than any other aspect to its expressiveness. Schumann could have set Emmanuel Geibel's rhythmically regular poem as shown in Figure 8a. The four-bar hypermeter of this hypothetical recasting of Schumann's vocal line maps perfectly onto the regular trochaic tetrameter of Geibel's poem.

My hypermetric analysis of Schumann's actual song (Figure 8b) reveals how much more complex it is than my hypothetical setting. Although Schumann appears to have had four-bar hypermeter in the back of his mind as he set the poem, he employed a number of techniques to disrupt this normative scheme. He frequently expanded individual harmonies (and hyperbeats); I have shown expanded hyperbeats with dotted lines after the appropriate hyperbeat numbers. The initial tonic already receives such treatment; this expansion, drawing out the word "tief" (deep), aptly expresses the extreme intensity of the speaker's pain. The tonic and the corresponding hyperdownbeat are stretched even more at the return of the opening (m. 31). Dominant harmonies are also frequently expanded, usually via poignant piano interludes (the untexted portions of Figure 8b show the melodic lines of the interludes); these expanded dominants are often associated with fourth hyperbeats (see mm. 5–6, 10–11, 36–37, etc.).

Measures 19–22 show a second type of hypermetric irregularity: repetition of bars (shown in my analysis with square brackets around the repeated hyperbeats). The piano interlude in mm. 19–20 anticipates the following vocal line, so that there are two statements of the first and second hyperbeat.

Perhaps the most radical type of hypermetric irregularity in this song, however, is hypermetric ambiguity; substantial stretches of the song do not fit neatly into a single hypermetric scheme, but lend themselves equally well to more than one analysis. The ambiguous portions are shown in Figure 8b by double layers of numbers. In the upper layer in mm. 7–10, for example,

FIGURE 8. Schumann, “Tief im Herzen,” op. 138/2 (1849)

(a) Hypothetical hypermetrically regular vocal setting

(Translation: “Deep in my heart I carry pain. I must be quiet outwardly; deep down, I hide my beloved pain from the view of the world, and only the soul feels it, for the body is unworthy of it. As the spark, free and bright, hides within the pebble, I bear pain deep within myself.”)

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Tief im Her - zen trag ich Pein, muss nach aus - sen stil - le sein,

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

den ge - lieb - ten Schmerz ver - heh - le tief ich vor - der Welt Ge - sicht,

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

und es fühlt ihn nur - die See - le, denn der Leib ver - dient ihn nicht.

1 2 3 4 1 2

Wie - der Fun - ke, frei und licht, sich ver - birgt im

3 4 1 2 3 4

Kie - sel - stein, trag - ich in - nen tief - die Pein.

FIGURE 8. (continued)

(b) Hypermetric analysis of actual setting of "Tief im Herzen"

1----- 2 3 4----- 1-----

8 (1)----- 2 3 4----- 1----- 2 3

15 4 3 4 1 2 3 4=1 2 4 [1 2]

23 3----- 4 1 2 3 4

31 1----- 2 3 4----- 1

39 2 3 4----- 1 2 3

46 4----- 1 2 3 4 1

tief die Pein.

Schumann's setting of the line "muss nach aussen stille sein" ([I] must be quiet externally) falls into place as a four-bar hypermeasure (although, as was mentioned, Schumann expands the fourth hyperbeat). We could refer to this hypermetric analysis of these bars as *poetry-driven*; i.e., this is the hypermeter that the poetic line suggests. On the other hand, mm. 7–8 correspond very closely, both harmonically and melodically, to mm. 1–2. Such correspondences are significant

factors in hypermetric analysis; similar bars should, all other things being equal, be assigned the same hyperbeat numbers. The lower layer of hypermetric numbers at mm. 7–10 takes the correspondence between these bars and the opening of the song into account, resulting in a *music-driven* analysis that is equally as valid as the poetry-driven one.

A similar ambiguity arises in mm. 12–16, at “den geliebten Schmerz verhehle” ([I] conceal the beloved pain). Again, the upper layer of numbers shows the poetry-driven analysis, which is similar to that shown by the upper layer at mm. 7–10. Once again, however, consideration of melodic parallelism suggests a different analysis. Measures 12–13, like mm. 7–8, correspond to mm. 1–2. Measures 14 and 15, moreover, clearly correspond to mm. 3 and 4. It is logical to assign the same hypermetric numbers to the corresponding bars; the resulting music-driven hypermetric analysis of mm. 12–16 is shown in the lower layer of numbers in Figure 8b.

The expressive effect of the plethora of hypermetric irregularities and ambiguities in this song can best be comprehended by comparing Schumann’s music to my revision. The revision exudes calm, complacent predictability, and nothing more. Schumann’s song, with its uncomplicated surface-level rhythms and primarily diatonic harmonies, also conveys a sense of superficial calm; but consistent hypermetric irregularity and ambiguity imbue it with a subtle discomfort and unease (whether or not one is aware of the precise source of the unease). Schumann has found a perfect way to suggest the meaning of the poem, which is about external calm and inner pain: “Deep in my heart I bear pain; I must be quiet externally; I hide the beloved pain well from the face of the world, and only the soul feels it, for the body does not deserve it. As the spark, free and bright, hides within the pebble, I carry my pain deep inside.” The musical element suggestive of pain (the hypermeter) is indeed “deep inside,” below the surface.



I conclude with a brief look at one of Schumann's Mignon settings from 1849: "So lasst mich scheinen," op. 98a/9 (Figure 9), which illustrates all three of the expressive rhythmic and metric devices discussed in this paper.¹⁶ Schumann at times distorts the surface-level rhythm of Goethe's text. The poem has a fairly regular rhythm; it is written in iambic tetrameter, with just a few irregular stresses. Schumann distorts this primarily regular rhythm in various ways. The poetic rhythm could be rendered musically by duple meter, or by triple meter with elongation of stressed syllables, the stressed syllables in both cases being coordinated with downbeats; the triple-meter possibility is shown in Figure 9a. Schumann *does* select triple meter, and occasionally treats stressed syllables in the manner mentioned above (see mm. 5, 9, 25, 46 in Figure 9b). Frequently, however, he places stressed syllables on weak beats, and unstressed

FIGURE 9. Schumann, "So lasst mich scheinen," op. 98a/9 (1849)

(a) Hypothetical vocal setting

(Translation: "So let me seem until I become. Do not take the white robe from me. I hasten from this beautiful earth down into that steadfast house. There I shall rest for a brief quiet [time]—then my refreshed eyes shall open. Then I shall leave behind my outer self, the girdle and the wreath. And those heavenly beings, they do not concern themselves with man or woman, and no garments, no robes shall cover my transfigured body. To be sure, I have lived without anxiety and toil, yet I have felt deep pain enough. Through sorrow I aged too soon; make me forever young again!")

* 1 * 2 * 3 * 4 * 1 * 2 * 3 * 4 etc.

So lasst mich schei - nen, bis ich wer - de, zieht mir das weis - se Kleid nicht aus! Ich

9 * * * * * * * etc.

ei - le von der schö - nen Er - de hin - ab in je - nes fes - te Haus. Dort

¹⁶ Ulrich Mahler briefly discusses declamation in this song, and provides more detailed discussions of declamation in other songs from op. 98a in *Fortschritt und Kunstlied: Späte Lieder Robert Schumanns im Licht der liedästhetischen Diskussion ab 1848* (Munich: Emil Katzschler, 1983), 139–82.

FIGURE 9. (continued)

(b) Actual vocal line, showing poetic distortion and hypermetric irregularity

3 ^{1?} * ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{1?} * ^{*} ^{*} ^{*}

So lasst mich schei-nen bis ich wer - de, zieht mir das weis-se Kleid nicht aus! Ich

8 ^{*} ^{1?} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{1?} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{1?} ^{*}

ei - le von der schö - nen Er - de hin - ab in je-nes fes-te Haus. Dort ruh ich ei-ne

14 ^{*} ^{*} ^{1?} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*}

klei-ne Stil-le - dann öff-net sich der frisch-e Blick, ich las - se dann die rei - ne

19 ^{*} ^{*} ¹ ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^(*) ^{*}

Hül - le, den Gür - tel und den Kranz zu - rück. Und je-ne himm-li-schen Ge - stal - ten, sie

24 ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ¹ ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*} ^{*}

fra-gen nicht nach Mann und Weib, und kei - ne Klei-der, kei-ne Fal-ten um - ge - ben den ver-

29 ^{*} ^{*} ¹ ^{*} ^{*} ^{[1} ^{*} ^{2]} ^{*} ^{*}

klär - ten Leib. Zwar lebt' ich - oh-ne Sorg' und

36 ^{*} ³ ⁴ ^{*} ¹ ^{*} ² ^{*} ³ ^{*} ⁴

Mü-he, doch fühlt' ich tiefen Schmerzge-nung; vor Kum-mer al-tert' ich zu frü-he,

42 ¹ ^{*} ² ^{*} ³ ^{*} ⁴ ^{*} ¹

macht mich auf e - wig wie - der jung, - auf e - wig wie - der jung.

48 ² ³ ⁴ ¹ ² ³ ⁴

syllables on strong beats. Furthermore, he often avoids the elongation of stressed syllables, and therewith the regular placement of iambs within the $\frac{3}{4}$ meter. This is illustrated by the opening of my analysis of his vocal line (Figure 9b). Schumann begins by placing the unstressed syllable “so” on a downbeat, whereas the stressed syllables “lasst” and “bis” fall on weak beats. Additional examples of such non-alignment of poetic stress and musical meter may be found at mm. 14–16 (where the strongly stressed syllables “Still-,” “öff-,” and “Blick” appear on weak beats, whereas “dann,” an unstressed syllable, is placed on a downbeat); and at m. 34 (the strongly stressed syllable “lebt” appears on a second beat).

Even more striking than the unpredictable accentuation within the vocal rhythm is the complete irregularity of that rhythm, which is entirely at odds with the regularity of the poetic rhythm. Figure 9a shows the almost perfectly regular vocal rhythm that the poem implies. How different is Schumann's vocal rhythm! He begins with even quarter notes, but by m. 2 his vocal rhythm becomes embroiled in an unpredictable alternation between quicker and slower values that endures throughout the song.

Comparison of Figures 9a and 9b will quickly make clear that rhythmic regularity in the vocal line, corresponding to that of the poem, would have been a mistake. Figure 9a is extremely monotonous, not only because of its predictability but also because of its inordinate length. Schumann's actual song is much shorter, much more interesting, and much more expressive than the hypothetical revision. The regular vocal rhythm of Figure 9a merely engenders a dull, leaden calm—a sense of resignation and torpor. The labile rhythm of Schumann's setting, on the other hand, suggests a much more complex emotional state. It is possible to interpret Schumann's unpredictable vocal rhythm as troubled and restless—sensations that we can certainly attribute to Mignon as she recalls the pain of her existence and longs for liberation. One can also hear

Schumann's vocal rhythm, however, as implying a breathless exaltation—the excitement of one who is about to embark on that great journey to the land beyond the grave, where she expects the alleviation of her earthly sorrows. Schumann's rhythm, in short, comes much closer to probing the meaning of Goethe's poem, and the complex character of *Mignon*, than does the torpid hypothetical rhythm shown in Figure 9a.

Metrical dissonance is prominent at many points of Schumann's setting. Some of this dissonance arises through the aforementioned distortions of poetic rhythm. For example, the poetic stresses at the vocal incipit create a duple grouping of the steady quarter-note pulse. This grouping conflicts with the triple grouping that is clearly delineated in the piano part (see the asterisks in the first two measures of Figure 9b). Near the end of the vocal line (mm. 43–45), an obvious hemiola is produced primarily by musical rather than poetic accents; a duple layer arises from the durational accents at “wie-” (m. 43), “jung,” and “auf” (m. 44). Contour and poetic accentuation contribute to the articulation of the duple layer in mm. 44–45.

In addition to these grouping dissonances, there is much displacement dissonance. Such dissonance is prominent, for example, at the opening. Downbeats are suppressed in the piano introduction; the second beats, however, are associated with thick chords, and the resulting density accents create a prominent displaced triple layer. In the first vocal measure, the placement of the stressed syllable “lasst” on the metrically weak second beat continues this displaced layer (in conjunction with the piano's third statement of its opening figure, which also emphasizes the second beat). In mm. 4–5, the metrically aligned triple layer finally becomes audible, but continued accentuation of the second beat keeps the displacement dissonance active. In m. 4, a cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ chord, normally associated with a strong beat, contributes to this displacement. In m. 5, the opening piano figure returns, with its accents of density and duration on the second

beat. Measure 6 contains a second-beat durational accent as well, and in m. 7, there is a dynamic accent on the same beat.

It would be tedious to list all of the metrical dissonance in the song. Suffice it to say that such dissonance appears continually, even in the final measures. The numerous metrical disturbances contribute significantly to the evoking of the painful aspects of Mignon's existence, from which she is not yet free.

The most powerful expressive feature in the song (at least in the durational domain) is hypermetric irregularity. The opening of this song is hypermetrically so erratic that one can hardly consider it hypermetric at all. It is difficult to determine which bars are the strongly accented ones. In Figure 9b I have shown one possible placement of hyperdownbeats, but have added question marks to indicate that this placement is ambiguous. Signals for the beginnings of hypermeasures, such as parallelism and strong harmonic arrivals, are absent or attenuated in the first part of this song. For example, the vocal line in m. 8, with its motion from C_5 to E_5 , has some relation to the first vocal bar—but the relation is so tenuous that the designation of m. 8 as a hyperdownbeat on the basis of parallelism with m. 3 is open to question. Harmony is no more helpful than is parallelism in locating hyperdownbeats; there are too many potentially accented harmonies: the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ in m. 5, the deceptive resolution in m. 6, the resolution to A minor in m. 8, and so on.

Not only is it difficult to determine the location of downbeat bars at the opening of the song, but the putative hypermeasures that result from any effort to assign downbeats are highly irregular. Four-bar hypermeter does not appear to have been even in the *back* of Schumann's mind at the opening of this song. The hyperdownbeats in my analysis result in a three-bar hypermeasure (mm. 3–5), a two-bar hypermeasure (mm. 6–7), a three-bar hypermeasure (mm.

8–10), two two-bar hypermeasures (mm. 11–12 and mm. 13–14), then a five-bar hypermeasure (mm. 15–19).¹⁷ This hypermetric irregularity is not forced upon Schumann by the poetic rhythm, as is demonstrated by the fact that settings of the poem by Schubert and Wolf begin with regular four-bar hypermeter. Schumann decided to employ hypermetric irregularity for expressive reasons.

A glance at the ending of the song provides insight into what those reasons might have been. Remarkably, the postlude consists of two clear, four-bar hypermeasures. It was Schumann's strategy, then, to begin the song with extreme irregularity, and ultimately to resolve into normative hypermeter. He bridges the two hypermetric states in a subtle manner. Whereas obvious parallelisms between bars are absent at the beginning of the song, they begin to proliferate at m. 15. Schumann positions these parallelisms so as to suggest two-bar segments. The corresponding mm. 15 and 17, for instance, hint at two-bar grouping. Measures 20–21, 22–23 (which elaborate on mm. 20–21), and 24–25 constitute even clearer two-bar groups. Recall that two-bar segments are frequent ingredients of normative four-bar hypermeasures; from m. 15 onward, then, Schumann seems to be paving the way for the appearance of such hypermeasures. It is, to be sure, not until mm. 38–41 that he actually combines two sequential two-bar segments into a four-bar hypermeasure; before that point, two-bar segments are assembled into six-bar hypermeasures (mm. 20–25, 26–31, and 32–37).

Schumann's gradual replacement of hypermetric irregularity with normative four-bar hypermeter was surely inspired by the meaning of the poem: just as Mignon anticipates the shedding of her tormented, prematurely aged body, and her transformation into a being eternally

¹⁷ It would be possible to consolidate the three- and two-bar hypermeasures in mm. 3–12 into two five-bar hypermeasures (mm. 3–7 and 8–12).

young and free of pain, Schumann transforms the hypermeter from its initial disordered, tangled state into one that is untroubled and serene. Everything comes right in the end.

This song from 1849 beautifully summarizes the results of Schumann's lifelong exploration of the expressive potential of rhythm and meter. This exploration definitely continued in his late works. The devices involved, to be sure, became more restrained in the late music; distortions of poetic rhythm, understated metrical dissonances, and hypermetric irregularities replaced the overt and violent metrical conflicts that were so common in the earlier works. Superficially regarded, the works composed in 1849 and after, which are harmonically and texturally simpler than the earlier works, appear less interesting also from a rhythmic standpoint. But those who are attentive to rhythmic and metric structure in this music will be amply rewarded with discoveries of the remarkably expressive effects that Schumann was able to achieve with subtle means.

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ABSTRACT

Rhythm and meter are significant expressive elements in Robert Schumann's music. Nowhere is his awareness of the expressive potential of rhythm and meter more evident than in his *Lieder*, where the presence of a text makes it possible to determine just what Schumann was trying to express. The author focuses on three practices: distortion of the poetic rhythm, metrical dissonance, and hypermetric irregularity. Only Schumann's late songs are addressed, not only because they are generally less familiar, but also because two of the practices to be discussed (distortion of poetic rhythm and hypermetric irregularity) are especially common in them.

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